

# LOUISIANA STATE CHILD OMBUDSMAN

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### *What is the Child Ombudsman?*

The definition of an “ombudsman” is a person who investigates, reports on, and helps settle complaints. In 2023, the Louisiana Legislature created the Office of Child Ombudsman within the Louisiana Legislative Auditor’s Office to, among other duties:

- act as an independent ombudsman monitoring and evaluating the public and private agencies involved in the protection of children and delivery of services to children;
- reviewing state policies and procedures to ensure they protect children’s rights and promote their best interest; and
- safeguarding the welfare of children through educational advocacy, system reform, public awareness, and training.

### *What does the Child Ombudsman do?*

The Child Ombudsman provides the following services:

1. Reviews complaints of persons concerning the actions of any state agency or entity providing services to children with state resources;
2. Acts as a liaison for a child or family, including but not limited to advocating with an agency, provider, or others on behalf of the best interests of the child;
3. Makes appropriate referrals and coordinates when it is determined that a child or family may need assistance or that a systemic issue is raised by the complaint;
4. Evaluates the delivery of services to children by state agencies and those entities that provide services to children through state funds;
5. Recommends changes in state policies concerning children including changes in the system of providing juvenile justice, child care, foster care, and access to physical and mental health treatment;
6. Periodically reviews the facilities and procedures of any institution or residence, public or private, where a child has been placed by any state agency or department;
7. Periodically reviews and recommends changes in the policies and procedures for the placement of special needs children; and
8. Presents to the Legislature an annual report on the goals of and projects undertaken by the Child Ombudsman.

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## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (CONT.)

### *What is outside of the Ombudsman's role?*

1. The Child Ombudsman does not investigate abuse or neglect of children or provide emergency services. To report suspected child abuse or neglect, call **1-855-4LA-KIDS** (1-855-452-5437).
2. The Child Ombudsman does not have the authority to overturn any agency or department decision.
3. The Child Ombudsman does not have the authority to intervene in litigation.
4. The Child Ombudsman does not investigate complaints against attorneys, judges, or law enforcement agencies.
5. The Child Ombudsman does not investigate agency personnel matters.

### *Who can contact the Child Ombudsman?*

Anyone who has concerns regarding Louisiana's child services programs in state agencies, such as the Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS), Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ), Department of Education (DOE), and Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) can contact the Ombudsman.

### *What should I contact you about?*

Issues and concerns with the services a child is or is not receiving from the departments and agencies created to meet the needs of children, as well as concerns that a child's safety is not being addressed. We serve by helping you find answers to your questions and solutions to your issue(s) with the state agency. We can help you navigate the complex child-serving systems and connect you with resources.

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## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (CONT.)

### *What happens after I contact you?*

Our team will contact you regarding your concern/issue within three (3) business days of receiving a message. All complaints go through a preliminary investigation process where the Ombudsman determines if a full investigation is warranted. If so, an independent investigation into the complaint is conducted, which may include reviewing records, interviewing people involved, and contacting the relevant agencies.

The Ombudsman may recommend mediation or other alternative dispute resolution, or provide referrals when appropriate. Once the case is closed, you will be notified with the resolution to the case.

### *Will my information be confidential?*

The State Child Ombudsman has a strict confidentiality policy. The records of the Child Ombudsman will be confidential and will not be disclosed without consent of the complainant or individual on whose behalf the complaint is made, except as may be necessary to assist the state agency or service provider to resolve the complaint, or as required by law.

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